

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend claims 10, 12 and 15 as presented below.

Please cancel claim 11 as presented below.

Please add new claims 18, 19 and 20 as presented below.

The status of the claims in the present application, presented in numerical order:

Listing of Claims

1. (Original) A seat belt system for use by an occupant of a vehicle seat, the seat belt system comprising:

seat belt webbing including a solid material sufficiently configured to selectively effect a shape or dimensional change in the webbing in response to an activation signal.

2. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 1, further comprising:
a controller configured to selectively cause the generation of the activation signal to which the material is responsive; and

at least one sensor configured to transmit sensor signals to the controller;
wherein the controller is configured such that the size of the webbing is dependent on the sensor signals.

3. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 2, wherein the controller is configured to process the sensor signals to determine if at least one predetermined condition exists, and to cause the generation of the activation signal when the controller determines that said at least one predetermined condition exists.

4. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 2, wherein said at least one sensor is configured to transmit sensor signals indicative of the size of the occupant to the controller, and wherein the controller is configured so that the rate at which the shape or dimensional change is effected is dependent on the sensor signals indicative of the size of the occupant.

5. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 1, wherein the webbing includes a tapered portion having a wide end and a narrow end.

6. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 5, wherein the material is in the form of a plurality of ribs spaced a distance apart from one another, and wherein the distance between each of the ribs is greater at the wide end of the tapered portion than at the narrow end of the tapered portion.

7. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 1, wherein the webbing includes a first segment and a second segment, wherein the first segment and the second segment are tapered to each have a wide end and a narrow end, and further comprising a buckle connected to the narrow end of the first segment and a tongue member releasably engageable with the buckle and connected to the narrow end of the second segment.

8. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 1, wherein the material is a shape memory material.

9. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 1, wherein the material is a polymer characterized by a reversible length change when subjected to chemical or electrical stimulus.

10. (Currently Amended) A seat belt system for a vehicle comprising:
a vehicle seat occupiable by an occupant having a pelvis and a neck;
seat belt webbing having a plurality of ribs that are selectively expandable
in response to an activation signal to effect a shape or dimensional change in the
webbing, said seat belt webbing including a tapered portion having a wide end and a
narrow end;

wherein the seat belt webbing is mounted with respect to a seatback
portion of the seat so that the seat belt webbing is positionable across the occupant
between the neck and the pelvis; and

wherein the seat belt webbing is characterized by the absence of an over-
the-shoulder portion.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) The seat belt system of claim [[11]] 10, wherein
the distance between each of the ribs is greater at the wide end of the tapered portion
than at the narrow end of the tapered portion.

13. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 12, wherein the webbing
includes a first segment and a second segment, wherein the first segment and the
second segment are tapered to each have a wide end and a narrow end, and further
comprising a buckle connected to the narrow end of the first segment and a tongue
member releasably engageable with a buckle and connected to the narrow end of the
second segment.

14. (Original) The seat belt system of claim 10, wherein the ribs comprise
solid material that is responsive to the activation signals.

15. (Currently Amended) A method for controlling the size or shape of seat belt webbing, the method comprising:

monitoring a state or condition; and

causing a solid material in the seat belt webbing to effect a dimensional or shape change in response to a change in the monitored state or condition.

16. (Original) A seat belt system for an occupant of a vehicle, the seat belt system comprising:

seat belt webbing including a contractile polymer that is sufficiently configured to contract in response to a force exerted by the occupant on the seat belt webbing.

17. (Original) A seat belt system for use by an occupant of a vehicle seat, the seat belt system comprising:

a vehicle seat occupiable by an occupant having a pelvis and a neck;

seat belt webbing comprising a solid material that is responsive to an activation signal to effect a shape or dimensional change in the seat belt webbing;

wherein the seat belt webbing is mounted with respect to a seatback portion of the seat so that the seat belt webbing is positionable across the occupant between the neck and the pelvis; and

wherein the seat belt webbing is characterized by the absence of an over-the-shoulder portion.

18. (New) The seat belt system of claim 3, further including:

at least one occupant size sensor secured on said seat belt webbing, said sensor configured to transmit signals indicative of size of the occupant to said controller.

19. (New) The seat belt system of claim 18, wherein said controller is configured to modulate said activation signal in response to said occupant size sensor signals, wherein said modulated activation signal effects a rate at which said shape or dimensional change occurs.

20. (New) The seat belt system of claim 6, wherein said wide end of said webbing is adjustably mounted to a track, said track secured to seatback portion of said vehicle seat, said track permitting said seat belt webbing to be selectively vertically adjustable relative to said seatback.